

THE EMERSON HEIGHTS ADDITION: AFFORDABLE MIDDLE CLASS HOUSING IN
SALT LAKE IN THE EARLY 1900'S

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December 6, 1994

During the mid nineteenth century, one of the most influential movements to affect societal attitudes and philosophy in housing was the picturesque movement. The idea of living outside the city in large, elaborate homes surrounded by beautiful gardens was easily adopted by the affluent in America. Soon exclusive suburbs sprang up for the wealthy. Middle class americans also aspired to live out of the dangers of the crowded city, with its dirty air and unpleasant atmosphere to more pleasing surroundings. The rise of affordable public transportation in the late 1800's made this possible and soon large cities became surrounded by scores of middle class suburbs linked to the city by the electrified rail car. Even Salt Lake City was not exempt to this widespread phenomena of middle class suburbanization at the turn of the century. Subdivisions such as Darlington Place and the Perkins Addition, both fed by public transportation by the 1890's gave Salt Lake residents the Picturesque philosophy of life they yearned for with clean air, a yard, and a garden. One of the most prominent men at his time involved in the suburbanization of Salt Lake was George M. Cannon. One of the many subdivisions that typify his work in the Salt Lake housing and development industry is the Emerson Heights Addition, planned in June of 1909.¹

George M. Cannon was born in St. George, Utah on Christmas day, 1861 to Angus M. and Sarah Mousley Cannon. At the age of seven George and his family moved permanently to Salt Lake City. Mr. Cannon attended school until his twelfth year, after which he became connected with his father in the coal business. After two years, George M.

¹ Original Plat Map for Emerson Heights Addition, Salt Lake County Recorder's Office.

continued his education at the University of Utah, graduating in 1878.² In 1884, he was elected County Recorder of Salt Lake County, continuing to serve until 1890.³ In 1886, George M. Cannon formed the George M. Cannon Real Estate Company, with his brother, John M. Cannon.⁴ One of the company's most early developments was the area of Forest Dale, a farm formerly owned by Brigham Young. George Cannon purchased the property in 1890 and soon moved there himself. Cannon was instrumental in securing the extension of the lines of the "Rapid Transit Company" to this addition.⁵ In Forest Dale Addition, Cannon divided the land into lots, paved streets, laid sidewalks, and provided service to the city's water system. These lots were subsequently sold by him to builders of speculative housing or prospective residents themselves. The development process practiced in Forest Dale set the precedent of how the George M. Cannon company did business for the rest of its existence.⁶

In 1903 George M. Cannon, seeing the development possibilities of new subdivisions connected to the city by public rail along the East Bench, secured a large piece of property between 1500 and 1700 south and 14th and 15th east.⁷ Over the next six years he added to

² HISTORY OF UTAH, Salt Lake City, UT.: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1919. Vol. 3 Page 171.

³ IBID. During these years he developed the present system of abstracts of titles used in the recorder's office and which he copyrighted.

⁴ IBID.

⁵ UTAH, HER CITIES, TOWNS, AND RESOURCES; Chicago: Manly and Litteral Pub. Co., 1891. Page 99.

⁶ IBID.

⁷ Deseret News, March 1, 1913; Pg. 19.

that land and in June of 1909, with two other landowners Nathaniel V. Jones and Joseph Nelson, Cannon developed and planned the Emerson Heights Addition.⁸

Nathaniel V. Jones was a prominent Salt Lake born attorney in his late 50's and lived in the vicinity of 8th east and Roosevelt Avenue.⁹ Joseph Nelson, also a native born Utahn, was the cashier of the Utah National Bank of Salt Lake, a successful sheep and wool grower, and heavily involved in the construction of the Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railway.¹⁰

Another landowner by the name of John James Duke filed for a second addition to Emerson Heights in the winter of 1909 but was not involved with the George M. Cannon Company or Jones and Nelson.¹¹

Although at the time of the development of Emerson Heights the only rail service went as far south as Mt. Olivet Cemetery (500 south), Cannon had a vision that in a few years the rails would extend to the new subdivision, thus enabling a clean healthy residence for the workingman and his family.¹² By 1912, the Utah Light and Railway Company had finished an electric rail spur all the way to 900 south on 1300 east, the site of the new East High School. In the March 30th edition of the Deseret Evening News, Mr. George Cannon stated that the new street car line would soon make its way up 900 south to 15th east and be completed all the way to Emerson heights by June 1st (see fig. 1, map of streetcar service

⁸ Original surveyor's Plat Map of Emerson Heights Addition.

⁹ Salt Lake Tribune, April 19, 1921.

¹⁰ Press Club of Salt Lake; MEN OF AFFAIRS IN THE STATE OF UTAH.; Salt Lake: Western Printing Co., 1914. Page 371.

¹¹ SL Co. Abs., Emerson Heights, 2nd Addition.

¹² Polk Directory for Salt Lake City, 1911. Pages 97-98.

route 6, 1919).¹³ Public service to Emerson Heights was attainable by the fall of 1912 and the sales of lots began in earnest by early spring of 1913.

Emerson Heights was divided into 7 blocks, the first five blocks being divided into 60 lots and the last two, 25 lots (see fig. 2, map of Emerson Heights Addition). The subdivision included the south side of Roosevelt, all of Emerson, Kensington, Bryan, Logan, and the north side of Tempest Avenues between 14th and 15th east with the exception of Kensington which extended clear to 13th east (see fig. 2).

Property restrictions the George M. Cannon Company required to prospective land (and home) owners were two fold. One, that future land owners would not construct a home less than \$1,500.00, and two, that homeowners could not build a barn or outhouse less than 60 feet from the street.¹⁴ Other restrictive covenants are not to be found in relation to Emerson Heights. However, because of the fairly uniform setback of houses in the subdivision, it has been suggested that George M. Cannon Co. may have designed setback rules and loose design covenants for builders to adhere to. However, documentation for this theory has not been found. In a 1913 advertisement of Emerson Heights, Cannon stated that "there all houses must be artistic and desirable." It seems that this is the most specific Cannon and Co. became in regards to architectural design covenants.¹⁵

Emerson Heights Addition followed a simple gridiron street plan, an idea ingrained into Utahn thinking by Mormon prophets Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Each block is rectangular in shape and bordered by 75 feet wide streets on all sides. Lots in each block

¹³ Deseret News, March 30, 1912. Pg. 19.

¹⁴ SL. Co. Abstracts and deeds for Emerson Heights, 1909, 1911.

¹⁵ Des. News, March 1, 1913. Pg. 19.

were 25 feet wide by 125 feet deep. Lots bordered by 14th and 15th east streets were oriented with the narrow end towards the street. This lot division facilitated an I shaped 16 foot alley way system running through the center of all the blocks (see fig.2). This alley way system was intended to be a one way service road to each lot, allowing residents to enter the alley, park their cars on their property, and exit the block on the opposite end (see slide 11).¹⁶ This alley system proved quite successful with the construction of the subdivision's first housing stock in 1913-14. However, as time passed and the price and availability of the automobile became increasingly attainable, new residents began constructing private or shared driveways that led directly from the main street on to their property (see slides 9 and 10). From the beginning, builders and future residents of Emerson Heights bought one and one half to two lots to build on because of the unusually narrow 25 foot lot advertised. Thirty-seven to 50 feet gave builders plenty of room to lay a driveway leading from the street to a small garage within the lot. Whether or not George M. Cannon Co. intended for homes to be less than 25 feet wide or whether he chose the small lot size to entice buyers with the low \$50.00 price per lot is not known (but it sounds like a good marketing tactic).¹⁷

Consequently, with the construction of these private driveways for residents' cars, the alley ways in the center of blocks 2, 3, 4, and 6 were either never constructed or closed off soon after (see fig. 2). Central Alleys in blocks 1 and 5 are seldom used and barely accessible (see slide 24, alley in block 1). It seems the popularization of the automobile

¹⁶ Slide #11 shows one garage on the alley off of Kensington is still set at an angle off of the alley, proving that the alley originally was one way.

¹⁷ Des. News. March 1, 1913. Pg. 15.

influenced residents in Emerson Heights to want to publicize and show off their transportation instead of hide it in a back alley.

Infrastructure originally provided in Emerson Heights was advertised often in the local newspaper. The subdivision boasted well graded streets (a 3 percent fall), good soil for gardens, good building restrictions, decorative cement walks (see slide 13), hardwood shade trees (Norway Maple), and a hookup to the city water system.¹⁸ A few years later modern electricity was available and eventually, a hookup to the city sewer system.¹⁹ Green parking strips planted with Norway maple trees gave Emerson Heights a park like atmosphere, although the Cannon Company did not provide public parks in the subdivision.

Commercial industry and a church in the Emerson Heights area were not planned by the Cannon Company, but seemed to emerge simply because of increased population's needs. In 1916 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints purchased lots 4-11 on the north side of Emerson Avenue for a new chapel. Growth in the Emerson Heights subdivision and in adjoining areas such as Liberty Heights and Progress Heights brought many LDS church members to the area, necessitating the need for a new chapel close by (see slide 2).²⁰

In 1915 James B. Earl and his wife Lorena purchased three lots on the corner of Emerson Avenue and 15th east. There they built a combination home and grocery store. They named it the East Bench Meat and Grocery Company and it serviced Emerson Heights

¹⁸ Des News, April 5, 1913. Pg. 19.

¹⁹ Both electricity and sewer were not provided by the George M. Cannon Co. and were either paid for by the individual owner or the builder.

²⁰ SL Co. Abs. 1916. It is also apparent that this chapel was not planned for by the Cannon Co. because of the small lot size and the extreme lack of parking on the site (the chapel takes up most of the lot).

well into the 1950's (see photo 1, the grocery store as it is today is on the far right).²¹ In the late 1920's a Skaggs/Safeway grocery and retail store was constructed at the corner of 15th east and Kensington which served the area up until the late 1970's (see photo 2, the Safeway as it is today is the red building).²² Other retail stores have been built in between these stores as well (in the late 20's) and the street continues to be the social hub of the neighborhood even today.²³

The first houses constructed in Emerson heights (1913-19) were mainly the popular yet affordable bungalow. By June of 1913, 14 homes were either completed or under construction in the subdivision.²⁴ The average house covered approximately 1500 square feet and had two to three average sized bedrooms (see fig. 3, house plan of 1467 Emerson). Public spaces in the house were usually oriented across the front of the house. The kitchen, bath and bedrooms were located to the rear and to one side (fig. 3). A half or shelf basement was usually included under the rear portion of the house for storage and a wash room. Most bungalows in the area included a deep front porch and a sleeping porch on the rear. A majority of these bungalows were constructed of local brick and utilized either the prairie or craftsman styles, the former being more prevalent (see photo 3). Of particular interest are two California style bungalows located on the north side of Bryan avenue. One, located at 1435 Bryan was constructed in 1915 by Michael O. J. Wald of wood covered by

²¹ SL Co. Abs., 1915; SL Polk Directory, 1916.

²² SL Polk Dir.; Interview with Craig Fuller, historian, Utah State Historical Society.

²³ At present Brackman's Bagels owns the old Safeway and a audio electronics business occupies the spot where the East Bench Grocery store was.

²⁴ Des. News, June 28, 1913. Pg. 15.

decorative shingles. It boasts an impressive cobble rock porch and foundation with exposed beams and purlins above (see slide 17).²⁵ The second, located at 1449 Bryan was constructed that same year by the Deseret Building Society for Richard Charles Farrington, a local salesman of Ediphones and dictographs.²⁶ The Farrington house is smaller and less elaborate but still retains its California style front porch with exposed beams and purlins (see slide 19).

The most notable of craftsman style homes in Emerson Heights is the two story Emma Mae Moxley home at 1435 Logan avenue. It was built around 1913 by the Bettilyon Home Builders Company of masonry and has a porte cochere (see slide 23).²⁷ In addition another large craftsman style home was constructed at 1433 Kensington by the Modern Home Building Company about the same time (see photo 4, the house on the far left).

As Salt Lake City entered the 1920's the period revival style became popular. Emerson Heights was not exempt to this influence and almost all of the remaining lots in the subdivision were filled with period revival bungalows and cottages (see photo 5). The period revival cottages built in Emerson Heights were about the same size as the bungalows but were more square in shape. Room arrangement and size tended to be the same and most of these cottages were under 3000 square feet on the ground floor. However, unlike the prairie bungalows of the preceding decade these period revival homes usually included full basements, thus giving potential space for more bedrooms. Most of the 1920's period revival homes in Emerson Heights of brick and plain in ornamentation, using english tudor

²⁵ SL Co. Abs, 1915.

²⁶ IBID.

²⁷ IBID.

motifs such as half timbering sparingly (see photo 5). These homes, like the bungalows, were also of moderate price (between 2 and 3 thousand dollars).²⁸

Because George M. Cannon Company intended to attract the middle class buyer to Emerson Heights, he offered small lots for a reasonable price. In addition, the process by which homes were financed and constructed also followed the lines of moderate capital investment. For instance, the Cannon company did not build any of the homes in Emerson Heights. Cannon preferred to provide lots and minimum infrastructure in a good accessible area. This was to him a more safe investment and less of a loss if the area did not sell. He preferred to let the prospective resident buy the lots from him and then have the resident engage a private builder to build the house. Cannon also sold lots to builders who would then erect speculative housing to sell to the general public.²⁹

Speculative house builders were prevalent during the turn of the century housing boom in Salt Lake City. Emerson Heights grew rapidly mostly due to their efforts. Among the first of many builders to erect 'spec houses' in the subdivision were the Birkinshaw brothers. From the years 1913-14 the four brothers Joseph, Charles, Thomas, and Benjamin purchased a total of sixteen building lots located on blocks 5 and 7 (see fig. 2 Roosevelt, Emerson, and Kensington Aves.).³⁰ On these lots they constructed nine prairie style bungalows in the \$2000.00 range. The four on Kensington are almost identical to each other (see slides 14-15 or photo 6). The three constructed on block 5 utilize a slightly larger plan (see fig 3, plan of house) but are also very similar (see photo 3, the house on the left). It

²⁸ SL Co Abs., 1920's - 1930's.

²⁹ SL Co. Abs., Des. News, ect..

³⁰ IBID.

seems that each brother headed the building of one house, financing separately its construction through a local building and loan association.³¹ After some of the homes were finished, Joseph Birkinshaw and his wife Florence moved into one of the bungalows (1467 Emerson Ave.) in order to facilitate its sale and , more than likely, the sale of the other homes built by his brothers.³²

Another builder involved in early speculative housing in Emerson Heights was William J. Smith.³³ Smith purchased three lots at the northwest corner of 15th east and Bryan avenue as well as two more lots further down on 15th east. With financing from Ashton Jenkins Company (and possibly house plans) Smith erected a sizable prairie style bungalow constructed of stone faced concrete block and brick (see photo 7). The other house was of a smaller scale constructed of like materials (see photo 8, the house on the far right).³⁴ It is possible (and likely) that Smith used the large corner house as a model of his building capabilities.³⁵

One major investor in speculative housing in Emerson Heights in the 1920's was Judge Daniel N. Straup and his wife Della.³⁶ In 1911 Straup, with financing from the Oquirrh Land and Ranch Company, bought all 25 lots located on block 6 (see fig. 2, the

³¹ SL Co. Abs. 1913-14. The homes on Kensington were financed by the Salt Lake Security and Trust Association.

³² The 1915 SL Polk Directory shows J. Birkinshaw at 1467 Emerson and his three other brothers living elsewhere in Salt Lake.

³³ SL Polk Dir., 1913; SL Co. Abs., 1913.

³⁴ Sandborn fire insurance maps of Salt Lake City, Vol 3 page 324.

³⁵ SL Co. Abs.. Smith, as a majority of other spec house contractors, bought building lots in subdivisions all over Salt Lake to construct houses on.

³⁶ Salt Lake Tribune, 9-9-47 and 11-1-45.

north side of Kensington between 14th and 13th east).³⁷ The Straups held on to the land until 1924, when they engaged White Construction Co. to build a home at 1357 Kensington. In 1925 the Straups hired Layton Construction (still in business today) to build seven more homes adjacent to the other, all of which were completed by the early 1930's. Because no withdraw of deeds on these homes are to be found in the county abstracts until the mid 1930's it is possible that the Straups rented these homes to tenants before selling them outright (see photo 5, housing stock built by Layton Const.).

Over the decades, Emerson Heights has matured gracefully and little changes have been made to its housing stock. One of the most common modifications made over the years is the investment of aluminum soffit and fascia. Window replacements are also present in some homes but none have received size modifications. Storm windows and doors are common in the area and are thankfully less distracting than some window replacements. Only two homes in the subdivision have received sizable additions.³⁸ It is in fact surprising that more homes in the subdivision have not received major remodelings or changes. The reasons for this probably have to do with the original size of the homes, their one story design, and the size of their lots. Both one story prairie style bungalows and period revival cottages share the difficulty of integrating successful additions. The small narrow size of the lots also make it difficult to add to the side and rear of the homes. The only way to add on is up, which usually results with incredibly disastrous results. Also, the fact that most of the

³⁷ SL Co. Abs., 1911.

³⁸ These homes are two of the two story craftsmen style homes and were added to with taste because of their original size, ie. two story.

houses in Emerson Heights are constructed of brick makes the homeowner less likely to make major changes to their exterior.

The social history of Emerson Heights parallels other subdivisions in the area in that its first inhabitants were mainly blue collar workers or white collar workers just starting out in their careers. Some examples of occupations original residents held are that of music teacher, stenographer, salesman, young attorney, carpenter, insurance agent, fireman, clerk, foreman at ZCMI, and a secretary treasurer for a local coal company.³⁹ These occupations automatically put original residents of the area in the middle class, excluding many minority groups that filled so much of Salt Lake City's lower class housing closer to the city center. Although no written race restrictions were ever enforced in Emerson Heights, not many minority groups were a part of its original development. Good pioneer names like Smith, Asper, Evans, and Kimball were common.⁴⁰

Up until the 1970's original homeowners (or their children) continued to occupy Emerson Heights, thus maintaining the racial homogeneity of the area. The community contained many retired persons and elderly. However, around the same time the elderly began to pass away and younger, professional type people began buying the housing stock. Today, Emerson Heights is largely dominated by upper middle class people just finishing or out of college. Race or color is no longer a restriction or heavy issue in the area and one is hard pressed to find a home for sale. The Norway maples George M. Cannon planted over 80 years ago are now mature and give a wonderful sense of permanence and prestige to

³⁹ SLC Polk Dir., 1913-1926.

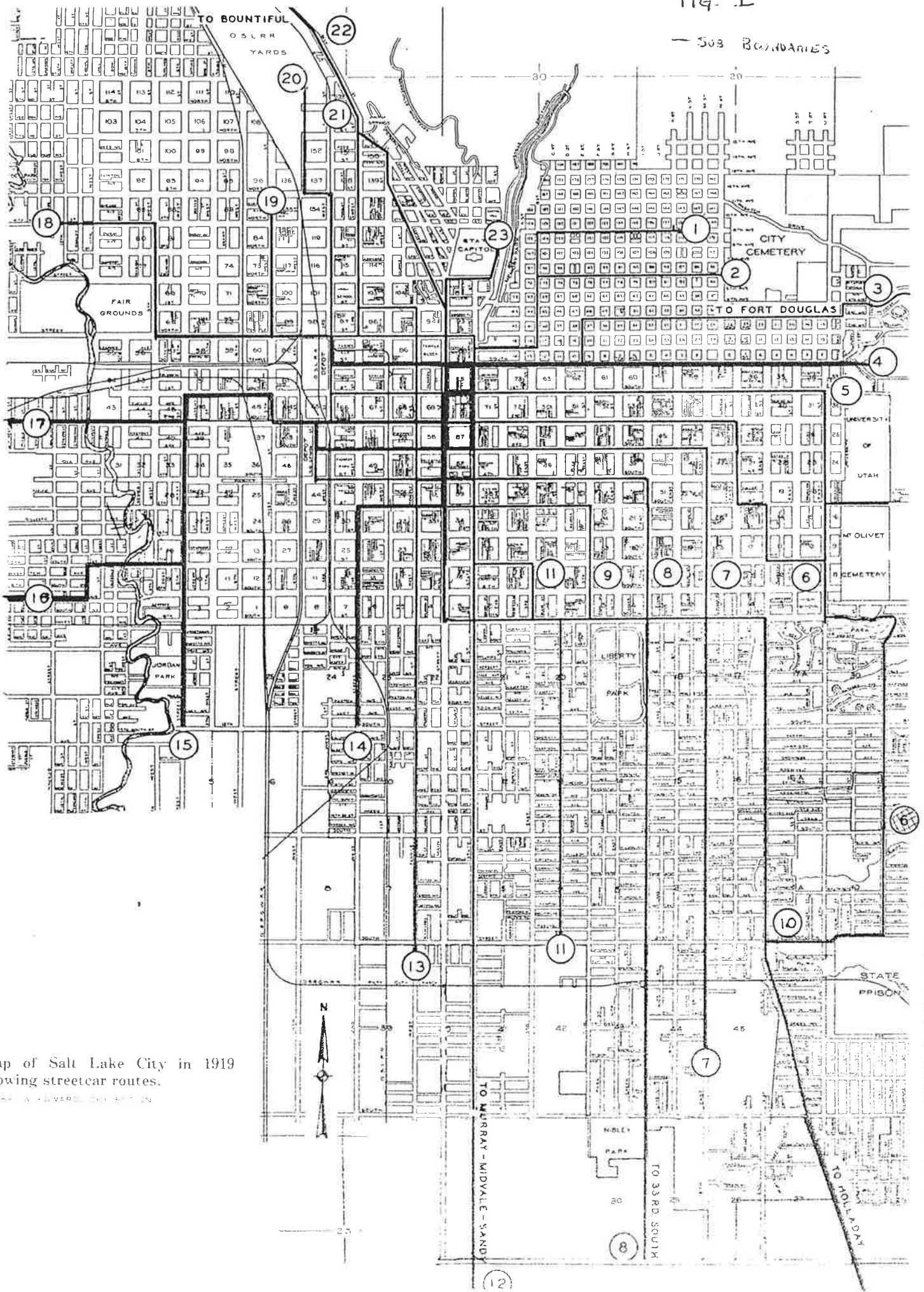
⁴⁰ IBID.

Emerson Heights. A bagel shop where the local supermarket once was now draws the yuppie crowd by the hundreds daily. Housing values in the subdivision have risen from \$3000.00 in 1914 to upwards of \$130,000.00.

In conclusion, the Emerson Heights Addition of 1909 that George M. Cannon Company originally envisioned has come to fruition. The subdivision has matured and adjusted well to changing social and economical factors over the years without losing its integrity. To its residents today the deserted back alleys and narrow driveways and small lots are all what give Emerson Heights its character and are for many people the very reason for putting up with the subdivisions's parking problems and preservation challenges.

FIG. 1

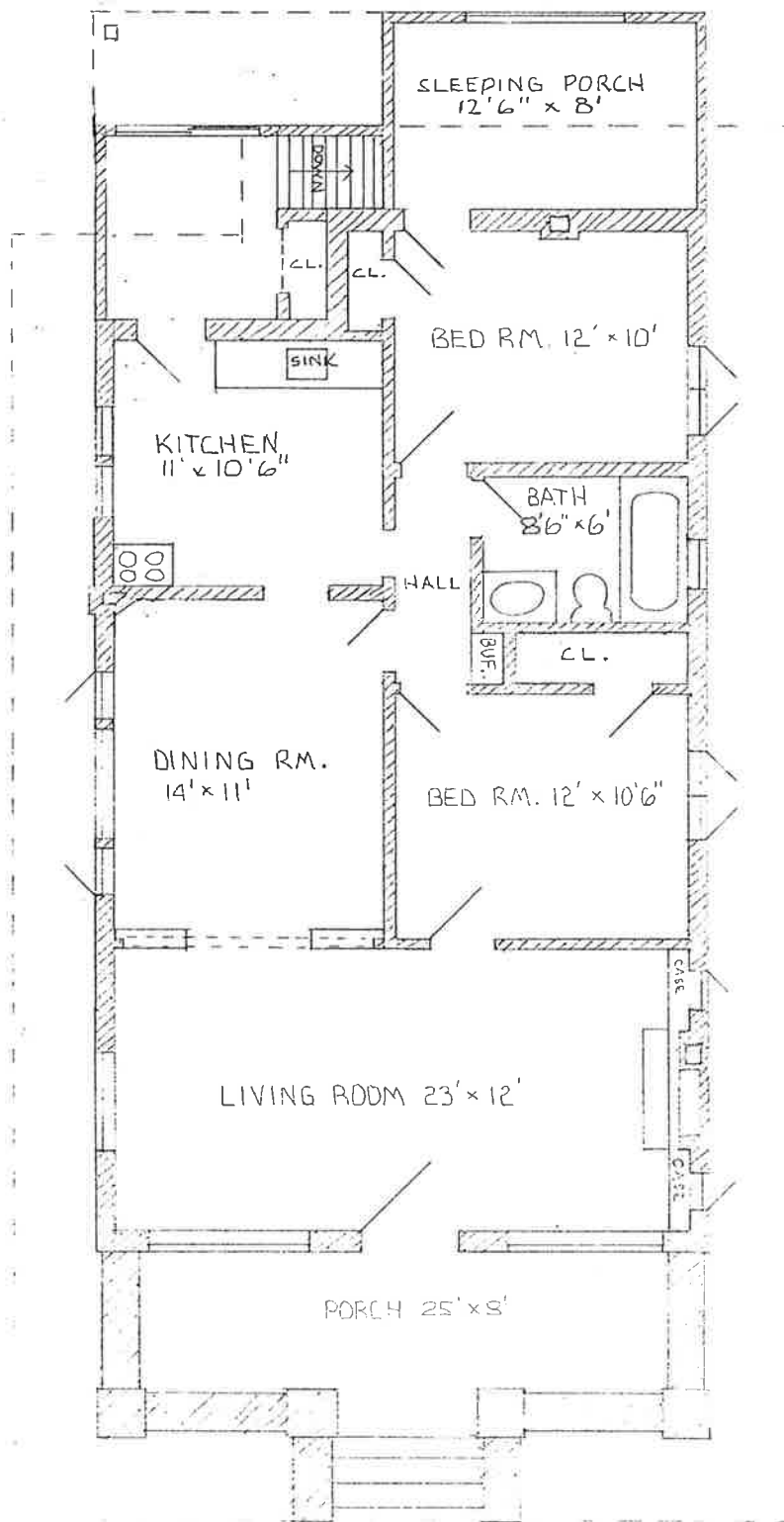
— SUB BOUNDARIES



Map of Salt Lake City in 1919
showing streetcar routes.

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Fig. 3



FLOOR PLAN

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